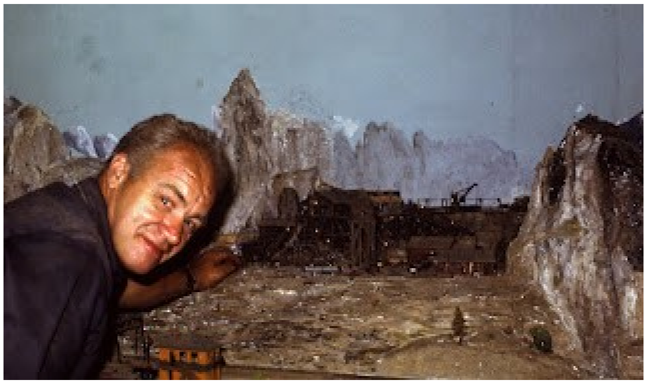
MMR_0015 Jock Oliphant **Canada's first Master Model Railroader.**



The fifteenth member to join the ranks of Master Model Railroader is Jock Oliphant, Winnipeg, Manitoba; certification as Master Builder, Motive Power; Master Builder, Cars; Master Builder, Structures; Master Builder, Scenery; Model Railroad Engineer; Civil Model Railroad Engineer; Electrical, and Association Volunteer having qualified him for this distinction.

Jock is well known to many NMRA members for his superb craftsmanship, having won the top NMRA model building recognition, the "Gold Award", at three National contest events and having won several Regional contest awards.

Joining the NMRA in 1960, he is now a Life Member and has served as Achievement Program advisor since 1962 in the Master Builder, Cars category.

A member of the Thousand Lakes Region Board of Directors, a member of the Manitoba Short Line Association and the Winnipeg Model Railroad Club, Jock still has time for his own HO pike, the "Scottish Highlands Lines", which features most of his prize winning models.

READ BELOW PAGE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Jock Oliphhant - Winnipeg's legendary model railroad pioneer

Jock Oliphant was truly a model railroading pioneer. His spectacular layout, showcased at Railway Jubilee, the 1983 NMRA national convention held in Winnipeg, was a jaw dropping sight for anyone who viewed it. Born and raised in Scotland, with an almost indecipherably thick brogue, Jock conveyed the sheer joy of model railroading that he felt to all he met. WMRC In an article in The Lantern, the official publication of the WMRC, Vice President Dave Downie shared his reminisces of Jocks' popular scenery clinics which he often held for the club.

Jock Oliphant was a long time WMRC member who was Canada's first Master Model Railroader. He was the first (and only) person to win “Best-In-Show” at three successive national conventions.

It Aint Watcha Build, It's the Way Thatcha Build It

By Jock Oliphant, Technical Advisor, Achievement Program Committee

There is one important aspect of model building that I have heard *very little reference to*, and that is "pride".

I refer, in particular, to the pride that one feels as he watches the slow but steady growth of a scratch-built model, knowing full well that he has done everything possible to make the model the best he can. No compromises here, *or at least not many!* It doesn't matter that someone else has drawn the plans, taken the photos or written the article. Here is the finished product, built by your *own* hands, modified as you saw fit, and if you've really done as good a job as you think, *worthy* of the favourable comments made by your friends.

Fine! But what leads up to this rosy, cozy situation where one can sit back and feed his ego?

Well, I'll have to let someone else work out the formula, but I can name the principal ingredients: attention to detail, hard work and *patience*.

Now let's dig into some of the points which I personally feel are essential to producing a better-than-average model.

If you have acquired scale drawings and instructions, so much the better. However, you will not rate high in originality. For this you must seek out your own prototype car or structure. If it is readily accessible, swarm over it with measuring tape and note book. If you can find someone to work with you, it will be that much easier. But in any event, get a full record of the details. Here, a camera can be your greatest ally.

Unless you're economy minded, don't skimp on the pictures. Shoot head-on pictures of as many sides as possible. Long shots will help in establishing a setting. Close-ups will record the details. Three-quarter views will help, but you should bear in mind that it is difficult to take measurements from a picture which shows perspective.

Personally, I shoot most of the basic pictures in black and white and use colour film to record only essential colour data and tonal effects. The black and whites I use for scaling out data, resorting to enlargements if necessary—especially to pick out details. The colour pictures I save for colouring, aging, and finally, display purposes.

A final word on photography: get in the habit of lugging your camera and a tape measure around with you. Use your camera as a memory device for 'once in a lifetime' opportunities and if you can get one good basic prototype measurement, you can scale out the rest.

One final point, don't forget to use your camera for making a practical comparison. A picture of your final model compared to a picture of the prototype will tell you what your more charitable friends won't.

Scratch-builders are becoming more fastidious and as a result, many of the "scratch-built" class of kits are being better engineered. Unfortunately, better quality often results in higher prices. But the quality builder soon learns that it's worth paying more to get the extras and will even further refine certain items in a kit to meet even more precise specifications. However, for the purpose of this article, I wish to confine my remarks more to the art of basic scratch-building.

If a model is being built for competitive entry, there are a few "musts" you *must accept from the start*. On any type railway car, all under-body detail must be incorporated. At one time it was quite acceptable to skimp with only a three piece brake-set. Today, levers, rods, chains and all pressure and/or vacuum lines must be represented. Ribbing and structure must be prototypical. On structures, originality, complexity and conformance all come high.

> *Ed note: In the October issue we will feature an article entitled "Shrinking The Prototype" by Constance Morrell that goes into great detail on the easy methods of using an inexpensive camera and tape measure to recreate the prototype on your layout.*

A complicated model can earn points but creates more possibility for errors. If you select a most unusual item to model, be sure that you can substantiate your source. There is no good building a refrigerated Nurdley car unless you can show that one of the prototype railroads *also* made the same mistakes before you came along.

Above all, try to programme your time. Avoid rush, with its consequent pressure. Quality suffers and you may downgrade an otherwise fine model. Learn something from your procrastinating friends, who, at the contest, complain how they had to work until 2 A.M., just to make the deadline. And all because he probably spent too many evenings in front of the "Looney Lantern" watching Petticoat Junction.

A word of caution to those who may feel they can "dupe" their way into an easy prize. Do not claim a model is scratch built if, in fact, it is really a cross-kitted model. I recall a so-called "scratch-built" crane. It's pedigree: the boom was from a Tru-Scale 22 ton crane, a Rollins House engine was housed in a *scratch-built* lean-to and the whole thing was mounted on a Silver Streak flat car.

A final point on competitive model work. Don't hesitate to seek the opinion of your friends. Mind you, don't let them lull you into a false sense of security either. Too many "oohs and aahs" may mean that they have something better going in their own basements. Your true friends will be able to give you constructive advice. Take it gracefully and see what you can do to improve your model. If there is a serious flaw in your model, better they find it than the judges!

Since your finished model can't be any better than the materials used, I strongly recommend using top quality scale lumber.

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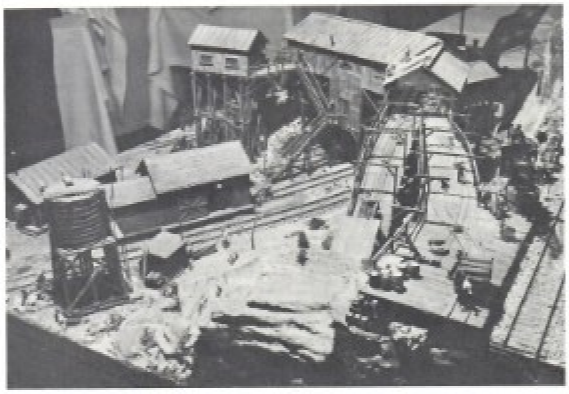
This model of the Tobermory Mine won Jock Oliphant the Gold Award (Best of Show) at the Indianapolis Convention in 1963. Note the weathered appearance on all the buildings obtained by the mixture from the "bottom of the can".

How long did it take you to find the two wheeled bike leaning up against one of the buildings?



A load of coal comes out of the main shaft in this scene as two workers prepare to take a load of timbers down into the mine. Note the "track" and the cable guides down the shaft entrance. All made from North Eastern scale lumber, glue and commercially available components, blended with patience.

I find that North Eastern not only uses good grades of wood, in a fine array of structural shapes, but also their measurements are reasonably accurate. Clean as the wood may appear, before cutting it into shorter lengths, I go over every piece with wet *and* dry sandpaper, grit about 320. This cleans off minor *saw curfs* and dresses the wood for later painting. (I don't bother with *sizing*.) Furthermore, by working carefully, you can take wood that is already delicately thin (1/32") and take it down to half that size.

I find that after a little practice with a bull nosed block plane, I can plane shavings off 1/32" stock until it is down to 1/64". Remember, the wood must be straight grained and planed with a smooth, steady stroke, *alternating sides to prevent curving*. The plane must be razor sharp. And always plane from the secured end of the wood along a smooth, level wood surface. You must be equally careful if using sandpaper to thin scale lumber as there is a tendency to *lose the "squareness"* of the lumber. Also, sand in one direction only—that is, away from the secured end of the scale lumber; it gets fragile rapidly, so go easy.

There is no such thing as scale glue or cement, so be particularly careful here. I use a hypo needle applicator and remove the surplus with a small sharp screw-driver. I know several modellers who advocate tooth picks for applying, spreading and removing cement. If you intend to use water soluble paints on your models you'll have to be particularly careful as *most adhesives* will leave waterproof smears that won't take paint. For wood to wood adhesion, I am partial to Ambroid for its holding and drying properties. For wood to metal, and metal to metal (unless it is to be soldered) I prefer plio-bond.

In recent years, great strides have been made in the development of paints for models. Fine pigments, high solubility, quick drying and thin coats are all qualities that have been placed within the grasp of the modeller. There is no substitute for *quality!* It is vitally important to read and *abide by* the instructions. Many a fine model has been ruined by course and careless painting. If you can't handle a brush (and I can't), there are a variety of spray devices. Air brush, with control over paint delivery rate, is the ideal method, although I've seen excellent results from simple atomizers and miniature spray guns; even from small vacuum type guns operated on straight "lung-power".

When your model is ready for lettering, be ready to show some restraint. Unless you are a commercial artist, or have the patience of Job, or better still the talents and the sable hair lettering brushes of Mel Thornburg (*see Hand Lettering and Striping Models in Model Railroader, August '56*), then call in your local decal distributor and plan your campaign carefully. Your first requirement is to start the job with a tranquil frame of mind and a steady hand. No good tackling this job if you've just spent eight hours on an air hammer, or if you've just had tl' marthreenis.

Decals and dry-lettering sets offer several obvious advantages over hand lettering. The letters are uniform in height and proportional in width. Letter edges are crisp. And they are accepted for judgement on the basis of conformity and neatness of application. You lose no points for resorting to *custom letters*. However, don't get casual! Pre-plan their spacing and keep them not only properly spaced, but in correct alignment. Use decal set liberally, two or three times, if necessary. On scribed siding, allow the decals to dry thoroughly and then cut the decals along the scribing with a *very* sharp knife or razor, then re-set. Apply flat varnish to hide the decal shine.

If you have elaborate letterwork to do, pace yourself and above all, quit when you feel fatigue or jitters setting in. And don't forget to put reporting marks and car numbers on the car ends. These are often overlooked, except by the judges.

Many articles have been written on weathering and it is more a matter of personal choice as to what looks best on the final product. Floquil puts out an excellent weathering kit which includes mud, grime, etc. New and "shopped" cars don't stay in mint condition very long. A few weeks in the open air, subject to sun, rain and dust laden wind soon starts washing out, fading and oxydizing paint work. However, one word of caution on weathering: apply your colours under the same type of lighting the train will be *viewed* under. More than one modeller has applied a beautiful paint job under the 300 watt lamp in the kitchen, only to have it become almost undectable under the basement fluorescents.

Probably the most frequently asked questions about the weathering of my rock bunker, coaling station and coal mine concerns the material used for aging the buildings, particularly the cause of the white-ish effect. Well, for what it's worth, here's what I do: I let a can of walnut wood filler settle until a thick heavy precipitate collects in the bottom. Open the can carefully so as not to mix the contents. Gently reach down through the oily upper liquid and remove a teaspoonful of the heavy residue at the bottom. Allow any surplus oil to drain off and mix the spoonful of residue in a cupful of turp subs. Mix thoroughly and try on a piece of test wood. Initially, there is little evidence of darkening, just wetness. Allow the test strip to dry thoroughly before judging the final result. Rather than attempt to darken the solution, it is more advisable to apply two or more coats, allowing for thorough drying in between. Remember, basswood will appear naturally darker than pine, especially after treatment.

When applying the Oliphant mixture to the model, you may be too cautious to use my technique. I apply the liquid generously, almost haphazardly, making sure it reaches all surfaces. I prefer a ¼" to a ½" brush, allowing the mixture to flow down over the model without dousing it. Set the model aside to dry and "voila"—a model fully stained and weathered, all in one step.

It doesn't take a super intelligence to realize that there is no simple and easy answer to competitive modelling. It involves many hours of hard and sometimes tedious work. But, in the end, if you can look at your model and feel it was all worth it, you are enjoying model railroading in its finest form. If you feel that you have improved your skills and craftsmanship and are now willing to go on to something better (if not bigger), you are a credit to yourself and the hobby.